

Becoming More Family-Friendly: Narratives from Eight Saskatchewan Workplaces



Work and Family Unit
Saskatchewan Labour



Saskatchewan
Women's Secretariat

2001

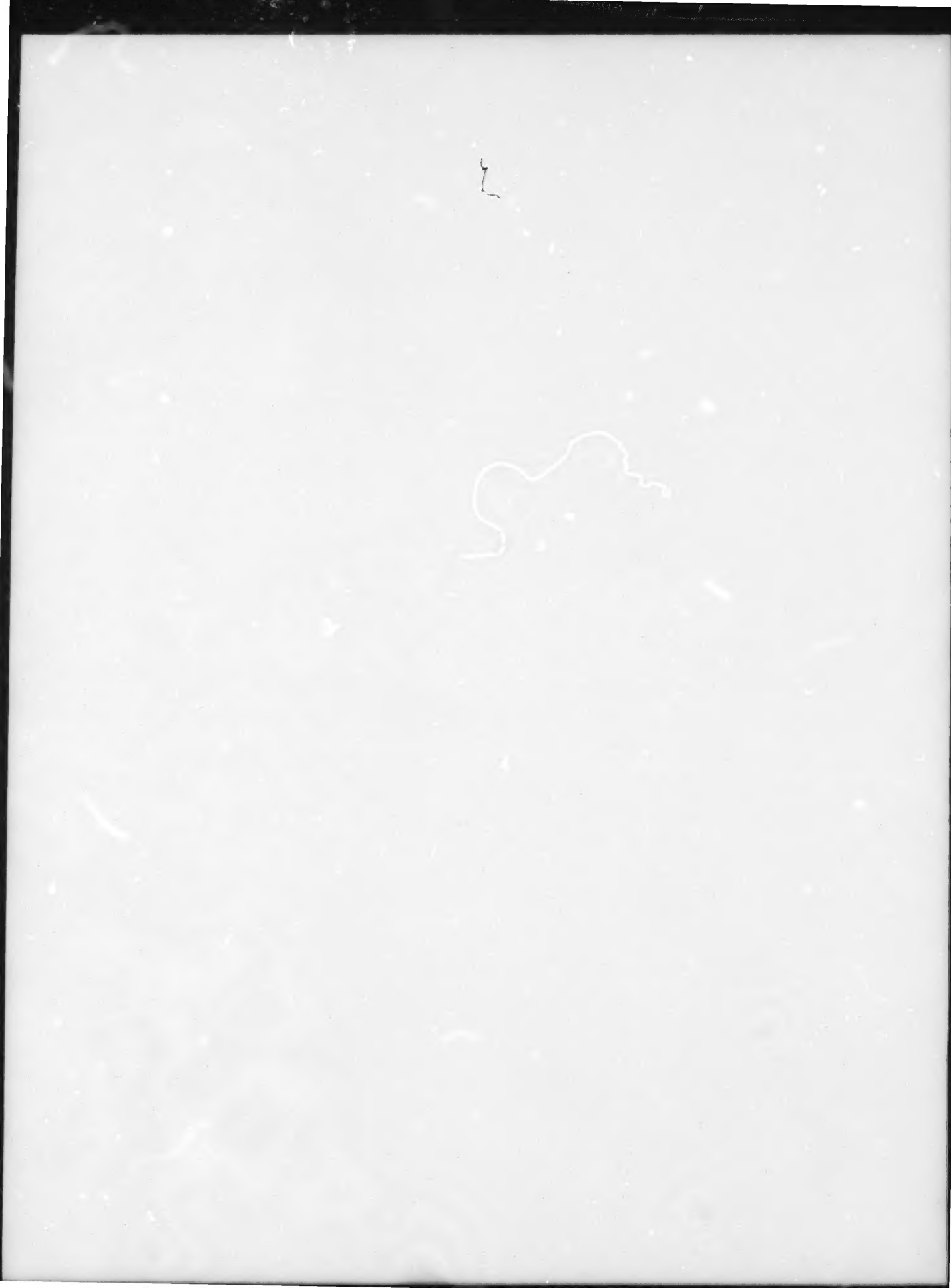


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INTRODUCTION

This publication profiles eight Saskatchewan organizations that have embarked on a process to become more family-friendly. The intent in profiling these organizations is to provide employers and employees throughout the province with examples of work-family/life balance practices that are in-progress.

Research suggests that the process used to implement family-friendly measures is, in many instances, as important as the practice or policy itself. Creating opportunities for employers and employees to connect on work-family issues is, therefore, important. In the spirit of assisting this kind of networking, the employers noted in this publication have agreed to make themselves available to those who may have questions, or simply want to hear more about how the family-friendly approach is working out. See page seven for contact information.

BACKGROUND

Work-family/life balance is now recognized as a major economic and social issue in most industrialized countries, including Canada.

In 1997/1998, the government of Saskatchewan undertook a Balancing Work and Family Initiative. The initiative was established as a means of involving Saskatchewan people in articulating their experiences with juggling work and family and, as a first step in developing a "made in Saskatchewan" response to the fatigue, stress, and lack of balance many employees are facing.

The Balancing Work and Family Initiative consisted of:

- a community development /capacity building process;¹
- primary research on Saskatchewan employees in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors;²
- a public task force;³
- and a provincial forum sponsored by the province of Saskatchewan in association with the Conference Board of Canada.⁴

As a result of the interest generated by the Balancing Work and Family Initiative, and as further demonstration of the government's commitment to leadership on this issue, the Work and Family Unit, Department of Labour, Government of Saskatchewan, was established in April 2000. The mandate of the Unit is two-fold:

- to co-ordinate government's efforts to address the negative consequences that can arise, for employees and employers, because of the lack of work and family balance, and;

- to provide capacity-building support which will enable key stakeholders to respond to work-family issues. This support includes motivation, knowledge, networking and skill development opportunities for business, labour, government and community representatives throughout Saskatchewan.

One way the Work and Family Unit coordinates government activity on work-family/life balance is to approach specific activities on a partnership basis. This publication is a product of such a partnership between the Saskatchewan Women's Secretariat and the Work and Family Unit. The Women's Secretariat, Government of Saskatchewan, has a mandate to provide leadership to government on policy directions affecting the status of Saskatchewan women. This is chiefly done by applying a gender-based analysis to specific issues. A gender-based analysis begins with the premise that the pattern of women's and men's involvement in economic, social and legal structures differs substantially. It is the role of the Women's Secretariat to work within government and the community to address such gender differences and point to changes that enhance the well-being of women.

Although work-family/life balance is an employer, employee, family, and community issue, the Women's Secretariat is particularly interested in supporting the growth of family-friendly workplaces since the vast majority of family responsibilities within the "work/family two-step," still fall to women. Workplace change that makes it easier to achieve work-family/life balance thus holds the promise of less stress and fatigue for employed women.

In the spring of 1998, many local associations, groups and organizations participated in the public Task Force meetings on balancing work and family that were held in ten communities throughout Saskatchewan. Many in attendance spoke of their experience with juggling the demands of work and family/life. The following highlights some of the stories that were shared:

- *I work 39.25 hours per week on a Monday to Friday schedule. I am married and have two children, ages one and three years. A typical workday starts at 5:30 a.m., in order to have my children and I ready for the day. By 7:25 a.m., I drive my children to daycare, drop off my husband at work, and commute to my workplace. I work full-time and spend my 45-minute lunch break running errands, paying bills and buying groceries because it is the only time I have to do it. (Public Health Care Worker, Saskatoon Meeting)*
- *Our Credit Union provides paid days to care for sick children out of the earned sick leave. In brief – the employee has sick leave and they can use it for themselves or can use it for children who are ill. We used to have a 5-day limit for sick children, but found it better to leave that open. We don't see any abuse and staff appreciate being able to be open and honest and take time to care for children. (Manager, Swift Current Credit Union, Swift Current Meeting)*
- *Fully half of informal caregivers who were employed reported repercussions that affected their work; such as, arriving late, leaving early, taking time to find or work out additional paid caregiving arrangements. (Saskatoon Council on Aging, Saskatoon Meeting)*
- *I've been lucky; my boss is pretty flexible and really tries to accommodate my family needs. (Participant, La Ronge Meeting)*

- *We had a third shift and had big problems – we went back to two shifts. Everyone was happier and our productivity remained the same.* (Human Resource Director, Doecker Industries, Humboldt Meeting)
- *Parents recognize the great value in their children's participation in sports, bands, clubs, etc., however, the result can be added financial strain as well as the never ending juggling of pickup and drop off to and from various sites. Family time has become greatly reduced and even eating a meal all together has become a rare event. The time and desire to become involved in volunteer activities has eroded, affecting the overall sense of community.* (Participant, Yorkton Meeting)

How Work-Family Issues are Framed is Important

While the Balancing Work and Family Initiative encouraged individuals to share their personal experiences with juggling work and family, the Initiative was informed by a view that work-family pressures are primarily societal in nature. To say that work-family/life conflict is societal in nature is to suggest that the stress and fatigue that employees experience is determined more by the structure and the culture of the workplace than by the personal shortcomings of employees such as poor time management skills.

This perspective suggests that lasting and effective improvement in work-family/life balance will be achieved by changing how the workplace actually operates in structural and cultural terms. Workplace structure refers to how work is organized, including embedded ideas about what constitutes a normal workday. This leads to consideration of the kind of work arrangements that are available to employees such as the standard workday, flextime, reduced hours, compressed work week, family leave options and telecommuting. The culture of a workplace refers to the attitudes, beliefs, values and taken-for-granted ways of doing things that characterize a workplace. The findings from the 1998 Saskatchewan work and family research, (which showed work/family conflict in Saskatchewan to be widespread), support the importance of developing a societal perspective on this issue.⁵ When a problem or issue is very widespread, attempts to solve it simply through personal or individual approaches are usually not successful. Further, employees who perhaps assumed that the stress and fatigue they were experiencing stemmed from their personal shortcomings, saw from the survey results that many others were experiencing similar pressures (for example, 51% of employees reported high work-family overload; 26% of employees reported high work-family interference).

What is a Family-Friendly Organization?

Since the focus of this publication is to profile the eight organizations and to examine why, and in what ways, these workplaces have incorporated 'family-friendly' practices, it is useful to discuss the characteristics of a 'family-friendly' workplace. The Work and Family Unit has identified five features or tendencies that make-up a 'family-friendly' workplace:

- **Flexibility:** this refers to an operational style that as much as possible, allows employees to have some capacity to adapt their workday to respond to emergent family issues such as a child becoming ill, school visits or special needs of elders.

- **Supportive Supervisors/Managers:** this refers to a management style that is about valuing staff. This approach is characterized by a desire to help employees achieve better balance between work and the rest of their lives.
- **A Culture that is Family-Friendly:** this type of workplace is characterized by overall attitudes, beliefs, values, and taken-for-granted ways of doing things, which supports work-family issues as legitimate workplace issues and as an opportunity to develop 'new ways of working.'
- **Alternative Work Arrangements:** an array of options are available to employees, including daily or scheduled flextime arrangements, job-share, reduced hours, compressed work week, family leave options, telecommuting, leaves and sabbatical options. Such alternative work arrangements are seen as one of the ways employees work and are not sidelined or marginalized.
- **Recognition of Child and Elder Care Issues:** this might include providing some form of support for childcare, providing access to a referral service regarding child or elder care, establishing on-site childcare or, as has been done in some Canadian cities, developing a consortium with other employers in order to provide emergency childcare.

With this definition of family-friendly it is interesting to note the following findings from the 1998 work-family research:

Table 1
Responses to Select Questions from the 1998 Saskatchewan Work-Family Survey^o
Number of respondents = 5420

Composite responses to a series of questions which measured workplace flexibility.

- 34% reported high flexibility in their workplace
- 32% reported low flexibility in their workplace

Composite responses to questions about the degree to which supervisors/managers are supportive of work-family balance.

- 47% reported a supportive supervisor/manager
- 15% reported a non-supportive supervisor/manager
- 38% reported supervisor/manager was neither supportive or non-supportive on a consistent basis

Responses to questions about the use and appeal of alternate work arrangements.

- 22% found job-share appealing, while only 1.3% had job-share arrangements
- 47% found telework appealing while only 0.2% had telework arrangements
- 22% found part-time appealing, while only 6% had part-time arrangements

Responses to questions regarding the amount of choice over child care.

- 34% reported little choice over amount of high quality daycare available
- 45% reported little choice over amount of high quality care available for sick child.

Responses to questions regarding the amount of choice over eldercare.

- 39% reported little choice over amount of high quality care available for dependent parent.

The information in Table I suggests that many workplaces in Saskatchewan have considerable strengths on the family-friendly measuring rod. Many employees report having supportive supervisors/managers and a significant number have high flexibility. Clearly, options regarding childcare, eldercare, and alternative work arrangements are limited. In keeping with other research, the Saskatchewan survey findings demonstrated that the amount of work-family conflict reported by employees correlates strongly with their stress levels, job satisfaction, work involvement, organizational commitment, and their intent to look for another job. These results constitute what is known as the "business case" for the family-friendly workplace and clearly point to economic benefits for employers who are family-friendly.⁷

Methodology for Developing the Profiles

These profiles have been developed to capture the rich narrative that emerged during conversations with representatives of eight organizations in Saskatchewan.

The process for gathering this information was as follows: we initially wrote to nine employers who we knew to have interest in work/family change within their respective workplaces; eight of these employers agreed to be interviewed and to offer a contact person for follow-up. The following discussion outline was distributed with each of the letters requesting participation and again at the time of the interview.

Discussion Outline:

We want to learn about what you are doing in your organization regarding work-family/life balance. Some of the basics we want to hear about include:

- *size of your organization, location(s)*
- *industry or sector and nature of the work being done by your organization*
- *number of employees and profile of workforce (age, gender, etc.)*
- *unionized yes/no*

We would like to hear your story in regard to:

- *what your organization is doing regarding work-family/life balance*
- *how you got started or what prompted you to begin*
- *who and what was involved in getting it going*
- *how it has worked, some of the problems/barriers, the benefits/outcomes*
- *advice you may have for workplaces wanting to become more family-friendly*

These conversations were conducted during January and February 2001; all interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed to form the basis for the following profiles. Each organization was provided with a draft of their respective profile for feedback and approval.

Table 2 below, provides an overview of the employers/workplaces profiled in this publication.

Table 2
Identifying Information for Organizations Profiled on Work-Family Approaches
Spring 2001, Saskatchewan, Canada

Company Name and Address	Contact Person	Phone/email
Corning Cable Systems 1370 Fletcher Road Saskatoon, SK S7M 5H2	Kandy Mantyka Human Resources Specialist	(306) 683-5406 kandy.mantyka@corning.com
Hnatyshyn Gough 601-402-21st Street East Saskatoon, SK S7K 0C3	Leslie Belloc-Pinder Partner	(306) 653-5150 lbelloc-pinder@hglaw.ca
Royal Bank Financial Group Royal Bank Plaza Corporate Human Resources 200 Bay Street, 11th Floor North Tower Toronto, ON M5J 2J5	Norma Tombari, Manager Workforce Flexibility	(416) 955-5814 Norma.Tombari@Royalbank.com
Saskatoon Community Clinic 455-2nd Avenue North Saskatoon, SK S7K 2C2	Shelley Newfeldt, Manager Diagnostic Services; Joan Spicka, Laboratory Technologist/Chief Shop Steward	(306) 652-0300 snewfeldt@communityclinic.sk.ca
Saskatoon Funeral Home 338-4th Avenue North Saskatoon, SK S7K 2L7	Bill Edwards, Owner	(306) 244-5577
Saskatoon Tribal Council 200-335 Packham Avenue Saskatoon, SK S7N 4S1	Wendi Spence, Director Human Resources	(306) 956-6100 wspence@sktc.sk.ca
SaskPower 2025 Victoria Avenue Regina, SK S4P 0S1	Bonnie Peters, Human Resource Consultant, Compensation and Benefits	(306) 566-2188 bpeters@saskpower.com
South Central Health District Box 2003 Weyburn, SK S4H 2Z9	Lee Spencer, President and CEO	(306) 842-8718

The next part of this publication consists of the narratives from each of the eight workplaces profiled.

Corning Cable Systems

Profile:

The Saskatoon Plant produces fibre-optic cable on a 24-hour, 7 days-per-week basis

Persons Interviewed:

Kandy Mantyka, Human Resources Specialist

Contact:

*Kandy Mantyka (306) 683-5406
email: kandy.mantyka@corning.com
1370 Fletcher Road
Saskatoon, SK S7M 5H2*

Corning Cable System's only Canadian plant has had many incarnations since 1981 when the plant was originally opened by Nortel. In 1994, Siecor, a joint venture between Siemens and Corning, purchased it. Then in 2000, Corning bought-out Siemens and now operates the plant. With a physically demanding, 24-hour production environment there has long been a practice of addressing and accommodating injury/disability needs of their employees. In 1995 a more formal diversity initiative was begun that concentrated on educating managers about the need to treat employees equitably rather than equally. In other words treating everyone the same was recognized as potentially unfair. Rather, treating people equitably allowed for individual circumstances to be taken into consideration when accommodating or responding to employee needs. This training initiative proved to be a valuable investment and with buy-in from senior managers, Corning soon came to see significant returns in terms of flexible management practices.

Another unanticipated but valuable opportunity arose in 1997 when Corning was invited to participate in the Saskatchewan work and family research, which formed part of the Balancing Work and Family Initiative. With almost 100 per cent participation by their employee group in the workplace survey, Corning was able to learn how their employees viewed their work environment, as well as the nature of work schedules and flexible practices workers desired. Some of the results surprised Corning. For example, they discovered that alternative work arrangements appealed to almost all management staff, the majority of administrative and technical staff and about 50% of production staff. They also learned that their management staff did not perceive flexible work schedules and options as something they too could access. The results were particularly valuable for Corning in that they demonstrated the link between the presence, or absence of a supportive work environment and factors such as productivity, stress, absenteeism and intent to turn over.

Up to this point there was some reluctance to formalize their equity practices due to the concern that employee

need and demand could be overwhelming. Following examination of their results from the work-family survey research, Corning embarked on a strategy and process to formalize their diversity practices. A coinciding change introduced at this time was a cross-training initiative for production plant staff. These combined changes meant Corning was positioned for greater operational flexibility.

The current array of practices and arrangements available to employees is not restricted to accommodating disability or family issues. Rather, the organization views these practices more broadly as work-life practices, that permit employees at different stages in their lives to propose working arrangements or schedules that allow them to attend to whatever life needs/issues they may have. Kandy Mantyka, with Human Resources at Corning explains it as a "tell me about your circumstances" attitude rather than a "this is the way it is" approach.

Employees who want new working arrangements or customized accommodations typically submit a proposal. In their proposal they are asked to consider how it will effect co-workers, operational needs, customers, etc., and to come up with a plan to address these issues. Any new arrangements are undertaken on a trial basis, followed by an assessment and from there it may become formalized. In one instance the employee determined it wasn't working and asked to go back to his regular schedule. There have only been two occasions when a proposal was denied and in each instance there were clear business reasons that were explained to the employee. However the door was not closed on other alternative arrangements the employee might have wanted to try.

The majority of alternative work arrangements are either compressed workweeks or daily flex-hours. Some have set up schedules whereby they work extra hours in order to take every second Friday off. Another nine employees, including some management, have opted for reduced work hours and another twenty-five, also including several management staff, are working alternative hours. In the production plant, a few employees have been able to partner with someone willing to work straight nights full-time, while the other partner works straight days full-time. In other instances the employee may be working straight days, half time because they don't want to work the night shifts and don't have someone to partner with.

Recently, Corning conducted a formal assessment of these practices and received very positive reviews, in particular from supervisors and managers. As a result of this way of operating the organization feels they have reaped the benefits of good employee morale, greater productivity and strong retention. "It's not something we are going to turn back the clock on. The little resistance we do encounter is small that's an area we plan to tackle education-wise," says Kandy.

Hnatyshyn Gough

of Employees:

8 lawyers

6 support staff

Profile:

Saskatoon Law Firm

Persons Interviewed:

Leslie Belloc-Pinder, Partner

Contact:

Leslie Belloc-Pinder (306) 653-5150

email: lbelloc-pinder@hglaw.ca

601-402-21st Street East

Saskatoon, SK S7K 0C3

The Hnatyshyn family has produced several generations of lawyers who have worked for this family firm. The resulting combination of work and family spheres from the outset, has allowed cooperative, flexible and supportive practices to evolve as a natural extension of what the organization values most. Leslie Belloc-Pinder, a partner at the firm, describes it as a primary concern that "day in and day out this is a friendly and enjoyable place to be." If there are any difficulties that arise, they are filtered through this main objective, rather than through the traditional, billable-hours bottom line. The value of profitability is tempered strongly by a greater concern for maintaining the familial and hospitable working environment.

There have been numerous instances when partners (male and female) have, for an extended period, worked flexible schedules that involved either part-time, or reduced weekly hours. For example, the birth and care of twins for one partner and his spouse was one such instance, while in another it was to contribute to the care of their two young-school-aged children, that resulted in reduced work hours. Day to day flexibility regarding work hours is also a common practice which allows partners and employees to attend to non-work responsibilities when they need to. Recently two of the partners took a month off to travel overseas and there is talk of developing this as a practice that will allow all of the lawyers to take similar leaves, and more regularly.

Operating "outside the box" in terms of traditional law firm practices has its trade-offs for Hnatyshyn Gough. When asked about this Leslie Belloc-Pinder says matter-of-factly, "Our firm brings in fewer dollars than firms that are open for business around the clock. It would be hypocritical to claim otherwise, because if you're making a choice that life is more important than work, you have to be prepared to work less and therefore earn less than you would if your life was consumed by work."

Leslie herself works a three-day week and shares office space with a semi-retired partner who works the other two days. When asked how she manages workflow while

being away for four days straight each week, she explains that occasionally a client may perceive it as a barrier. In order to overcome it however, she says the key is being both attentive and accessible and having a strong working relationship with her secretary. She can also rely on the support of her partners because they know from experience that she will ensure the work gets done, even if it means doing it at unusual hours. On the three days Leslie is in, working late is fairly typical.

Three support staff work traditional core hours while the balance work hours customized to suit their individual family circumstances. There are always at least two support staff generating documents which makes alternate work arrangements feasible for the professional staff. Additional effort is made to ensure support staff have the flexibility to attend to non-work responsibilities as they come up and equally importantly, that they enjoy a supportive and co-operative work environment. One of the pay-offs has been with good retention of support staff.

Lawyers who work elsewhere have often approached firm members and expressed a desire to be able to work the way Leslie and her partners do. "If our colleagues thought we were crackpots, they wouldn't informally approach us to ask, how we do it. I know we are a credible and well thought of firm but how we work is still an anomaly and seems unthinkable elsewhere."

In Leslie's opinion, that's why layering family-friendly policies over the traditional workplace culture in law firms has been a non-starter. In firms which have written, but have not fundamentally embraced progressive policies, accessing them may be career damaging. Leslie thinks that the absence of work-life balance in the profession contributes to high rates of alcoholism, divorce and burnout. She believes it's also at the root of why so many women leave private practice to find more hospitable arrangements in the corporate or government sector.

The pre-requisite to achieving work-life balance at Hnatyshyn Gough has been having like-minded individuals in positions of authority. There is a consensus among the partners of Hnatyshyn Gough that life is more important than work, that a balanced life is a priority. As Leslie Belloc-Pinder expresses it, "We're proud to be lawyers and we enjoy our profession. But we are not only lawyers. We are people who want to have good decent lives."

Royal Bank Financial Group

of Employees:

Approximately 1,500 in

Saskatchewan

Approximately 57,000 globally

73% female

Profile:

National financial services institution providing personal and commercial financial services, wealth management, corporate and investment banking and insurance; non-unionized

Persons Interviewed:

Norma Tombari, Manager

Diversity & Workforce Solutions

Contact:

Norma Tombari (416) 955-5814

email:

Norma.Tombari@Royalbank.com

Royal Bank Plaza

Corporate Human Resources

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Toronto, ON M5J 2J5

The vision of Royal Bank Financial Group (RBF) is to be Canada's premier financial service provider, with committed people working together as a team to create customer and shareholder value. Achievement of the vision is realized through strong leadership, a focus on people and the ability to link human resources policies and practices with business strategies. Fundamental to this approach is the delivery of world-class human resource policies and practices that enhance employee capability and engagement.

The evolution of the work/family/life platform within RBF first originated in 1989-1990, with a preliminary focus on identifying needs and developing a sound business case. The research phase involved conducting a detailed demographic analysis both inside and outside the organization, holding internal focus groups, participating in a Canada wide work/family study, and effecting a thorough literature review and best practices exercise with Canadian and US firms. Once approved, the responsibility for the development and management of the initiative was assigned to the Manager, Work and Family. A phased program implementation was adopted which commenced with the widespread communication of a Work and Family Policy Statement for the organization and introduction of child and eldercare information services. Next was the development of detailed guidelines for managers and employees regarding the assessment and implementation of a variety of flexible work arrangements, including reduced hours, job sharing, flextime, modified work weeks and flexiplace or work-at-home options.

A management training module on work and family was delivered to over 7,000 managers and subsequently integrated into various learning vehicles. In response to the diverse needs of employees, a number of resources and initiatives were added throughout the 1990s, such as parental leave kits, flexiplace training modules, job share registries, work/life newsletters and seminars, health and wellness resources, etc.

An approach adopted by RBF was the ongoing measurement and evaluation of the various programs and

flexible work options from both an individual and organizational perspective. Both qualitative and quantitative feedback was obtained through tracking and monitoring local and national employee opinion surveys, formal evaluations and other indirect feedback vehicles. The business case for workplace flexibility was significantly solidified with the two formal Impact Assessments on Flexible Work Arrangements (1994 & 1997) conducted by external consultants for RBFG (with employee users, their managers, co-workers and customers). The findings confirmed the positive impact on employees' lives, work performance and job satisfaction and highlighted the organizational benefits as a result of increased productivity and reduced absenteeism. It is estimated that currently about 30% of the RBFG workforce participate in some form of flexible work arrangements.

The *Workplace 2000 Partnership Pledge*, communicated to all employees, documented the importance of flexibility and work/life issues to the organization and pledged to provide support for personal and family needs in addition to training, learning and development opportunities. In turn, employees were asked to demonstrate flexibility and commitment. The years 2000 and 2001 saw the national launch of an RBFG Scholarship Program for the Children of Employees, as well as a work/life Intranet site along with a phased retirement flex option and global RBFG Employee Care Program (a combined employee assistance program and work/life support resource).

While the work/life agenda has been an integral part of the organization for over a decade, there have been many challenges, with one of the most evident being the need for constant communication and reinforcement. Influencing changes in attitudes and behaviours in an environment of altering workstyles and transforming work environments, is an ongoing task. Highlighting the business case and positioning work/life as an important management resource has been critical to the continuation and success of these initiatives. Experimentation, pilots and the creation of customized solutions in response to local/regional business needs (for example, Ontario teachers strike resulted in creation of temporary childcare facilities), is also encouraged. Providing access to educational tools and facilitating the exchange of dialogue at all levels, particularly at senior management and front line management level, is also an ongoing part of the strategy.

As a way to address collective issues and understand the changing needs of the workforce, RBFG is also involved in a number of collaborative efforts ranging from research funding, council memberships and special initiatives with various public, private and community stakeholders. Collaborations of this nature are perceived as key to generating the most effective and timely changes in the future.

RBFG will continue to support the work/life agenda by continued research and assessment and sharing of learnings both internally, throughout its business groups, and externally.

Saskatoon Community Clinic

of Employees:

Approximately 120 including management

*There are 90 union members
- 34 full-time and 56 part-time*

Profile:

The Saskatoon Community Clinic is a co-operative driven by members represented by a volunteer Board of Directors

Persons Interviewed:

Joan Spicka, Laboratory Technologist/Chief Shop Steward and Shelley Newfeldt, Manager Diagnostic Services

Contact:

*Joan Spicka or Shelley Newfeldt
(306) 652-0300
email:
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455-2nd Avenue North
Saskatoon, SK S7K 2C2*

The Saskatoon Community Clinic was established in the early 1960's as a multi-disciplinary health clinic with physicians, nurses, counsellors and other health professionals offering a variety of services that have evolved and expanded over the years. A client and community focused philosophy is reflected in programs ranging from birth planning to prenatal care, crisis pregnancy and parenting circles through to seniors groups. Furthermore, this philosophical basis means that advocacy to address issues such as poverty, housing, food security and tobacco control to name a few, is an essential part of the clinic's work.

The healthcare sector is widely understood to be a high-demand, high-stress, female dominated workforce except for senior management, which is predominantly male. Most women working in the healthcare sector have children, and may also be caring for aging parents, or providing other family supports and/or performing community work. This combination of workplace and demographic factors typically result in hiring and retention difficulties for this sector. While this workplace and demographic profile largely applies to Saskatoon Community Clinic the clinic differs in that they have long enjoyed a high degree of success in attracting and retaining qualified staff, particularly women. Besides the opportunity to work in an environment that responds to health needs in a more comprehensive manner, there is an absence of shift-work – a condition relatively hard to come by in the healthcare sector.

The Saskatoon Community Clinic has promoted family friendly practices whenever possible to balance maintenance of client service, cost and employee well-being. It has many programs in place including access to sick leave for dependents, an Employee Family Assistance Program, flex time used to attend to family commitments, paid time away to attend medical appointments for dependents, up to 2 years maternity/paternity leave and access to leaves of absence without pay.

With this backdrop, management expressed concern about increased costs and the potential for reduced access to

services for clients when exploring flexible or alternative work arrangements. In fact, the rearranged work week (5-5-4); was an item of joint discussion and problem solving for ten years before a pilot project was launched. It took a couple of years of negotiation between management and union to establish the parameters, criteria and terms for a pilot project to proceed. While initially it was thought too costly to include the management group in the pilot, the union subsequently decided to waive the deputy administration pay they were entitled to receive for the managers earned day off. The pilot was not trouble free or without its challenges but organization-wide participation resulted in significant buy-in and the rearranged work week is now an established practice and part of CHSA's collective agreement. In particular, full-time staff that can't afford to work a job-share or part-time, really appreciate and make use of the day off to relieve stress.

There is however, over fifty staff who work job-share or straight part-time. In particular, job-sharing was a practice that met with acceptance and resistance among both the management group and union members. A change in administration, in particular a new CEO, brought a new willingness and level of commitment to exploring family friendly practices. Once again, a pilot project was undertaken. Key elements of the trial included troubleshooting, adjustments and evaluation, in order to establish it as a workable and desirable practice.

Joan Spicka, Chief Shop Steward for Saskatoon Community Clinic says that having part-time and job-sharing in the Collective Agreement allows staff to address the work-life balance needs they may have, from young children at home, to pursuing professional education or upgrading, to eldercare, to easing into retirement. These arrangements have also allowed the organization to offer a substantial number of hours to their casual staff, which better ensures them a working salary and in turn offers the clinic a pool of workers, experienced within the organization, to draw from when addressing staff coverage. In addition, for those in job-shares, being sick or staying home with a sick child, attending to family commitments or appointments, results in reduced paid time away from work, a benefit for the organization. Shelley Newfeldt, Manager Diagnostic Services says that while these practices promote productivity and morale, it also means that staff are not coming into work exhausted or as stressed as before and are generally happier and healthier.

In the past few years, a new wrinkle in the job-share scheme arose when a department manager with young children inquired about the possibility of job-sharing. With the norm of 'good managers are full-time managers' firmly in mind, there was significant resistance at all levels in the organization. However, the department managers group and other staff felt it wasn't fair to hold up someone's career or force them into a different position in order to job-share. "That's not what this organization is about and when it was talked about we all realized we needed to be open to it."

There has been a great deal of hard work to get to this point but the outcomes and benefits of these practices are so significant that Shelley Newfeldt say the struggles, challenges and difficulties that had to be addressed and overcome, have been more than worth it. She thinks the organization had to move in this direction because it fits with the philosophy of the organization and what they are about. As a health care organization, it is appropriate to initiate programs that result in healthier lifestyles. However, both Shelley and Joan feel the reason work and family/life practices first got introduced long ago and have continued to evolve, is because it remained a burning issue for the staff and administration members who took it on and kept at it over the years.

Saskatoon Funeral Home

of Employees:

25 full-time

25+ part-time

Profile:

The Saskatoon Funeral Home is the last family owned business in this industry, in Saskatoon. This family enterprise began in 1910 and currently includes the main location, the Western Funeral Chapel, Prairie View Chapel and Crematorium Limited, Prairie Memorial Services, the W.A. Edwards Family Centre and management of the Columbarium at St. John's Cathedral.

Persons Interviewed:

Bill Edwards, Owner

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About ten years ago, Bill Edwards, owner of Saskatoon Funeral Home was reading a book by author Stephen Covey and recognized potential solutions to problems within his own organization. He determined that this was an opportunity to do things differently and began by sharing this information with staff. Changing the way problems were identified and changing how people treated each other was essential to building a healthy work environment at Saskatoon Funeral Home.

Ten years later practices and procedures continue to evolve and change in the ongoing effort to ensure that the principles of trust and fairness are fostered throughout the organization amongst employees, and between employees and management. There have been a significant number of retirements over the past number of years and some much younger people have joined the organization. That means there is a fifty-five year age spread between the youngest and oldest employee, in part because a number of retired staff have come back on a casual or part-time basis. The employee group is also about an even split of women and men. Most are two-career households and have family care responsibilities ranging from infants to adolescents through to elder parents. With this range of ages, life stages and gender, Saskatoon Funeral Home has an employee group with diverse needs regarding work-life balance. All this in addition to a range of operational locations and focus can present its challenges.

One of the keys to the high degree of operational flexibility Saskatoon Funeral Home enjoys is the extensive cross-training among many of the staff. The employees have an opportunity to learn a variety of skills, take on various responsibilities and operate in different work environments. Bill Edwards feels it contributes to more supportive relationships between co-workers, as there is a greater appreciation and understanding of what it takes to do certain jobs.

As a family owned and operated business, family and community have long been valued at Saskatoon Funeral Home. In practice this is evidenced in the opportunity for

staff to take time away from work to attend to family responsibilities but also to participate in volunteer or community activities. Although employees are paid when sick, there is intentionally no sick leave policy fixing a number of annual days. Because everyone's situation is different, issues such as sick leave are dealt with by management on an individual basis, when the need arises. By trusting that the majority of employees are honest, and want to do a good job, Bill Edwards feels it avoids the problem of abuse, or the traditional mentality of employees taking the full quota of allotted sick days whether sick or not.

By utilizing a two-week averaging system, employees can adjust and make up their hours as they need to, taking into account operational coverage, without concern about adjustments in their pay. The hours worked, including overtime are posted by individual employees on a computer system that is accessible for all to see. This also encourages honesty as co-workers see one another's entries. Saskatoon Funeral Home believes learning is a life-long activity and offers its employees financial help for continuing education, personal development opportunities, counselling support and so on. In terms of absence due to urgent and unexpected problems such as serious parental, spousal or personal illness, death in the family, etc., employees are provided with their regular pay and encouraged not to worry about work, and to do whatever it takes to stabilize and deal with the situation. Bill Edwards feels that it's typically at the beginning that these situations present the greatest stress for employees and the need for time away from work to deal with it is most pressing. However, often family or personal situations cannot be addressed with one or two days off, but may be best served by the ability of the employee to have thirty minutes of time for weekly appointments over a period of months, for example. Individualized flexibility has facilitated a variety of alternative work arrangements including, extended leaves for employees with farming responsibilities, job-shares, permanent part-time employment, stress leave, graduated back to work programs as well as phased retirement.

Bill Edwards gives a lot of credit for juggling these practices to the organization's general manager. It's one thing for ownership to create life-balance policy but quite another for the operational manager to put it into practice. It takes a lot of time and attention. That said, Bill feels that using the "it complicates things" argument to avoid integrating practices that allow greater work-life balance is a poor excuse to avoid the necessary work and commitment to employees that these practices involve.. That argument assumes that things were trouble free the old way. The payoff to doing things this way is in committed employees, who offer a high degree of co-operation.

Saskatoon Tribal Council

of Employees:

120+

Profile:

There are five corporations that currently operate under the Saskatoon Tribal Council: CRESS Housing Corporation, SDC Development Corporation, STC Family Services Inc., STC Inc. and STC Urban First Nations Services Inc. Each corporation provides programs and services as mandated by the seven STC Chiefs. These programs and services vary by corporation based upon agreements from the funders, or in the case of the SDC Development Corporation, by the members.

Persons Interviewed:

Wendi Spence, Director Human Resources

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The Saskatoon Tribal Council strives to maintain the social, economic and political bases of its seven member First Nations including their rights to land and resources, culture, language, self-government and self-determination. With this as part of its mission, it follows that a valuing of family and community, a strong aboriginal tradition, would be well integrated into the organization's philosophy and operational style.

Besides a minimum of three weeks annual vacation, family leave amounting to five days in addition to paid sick leave is available to employees. The distinction between sick leave and family leave might mean an employee is free to stay home with a sick child instead of having to claim their own illness in such an instance, in order not to be penalized. Day to day flexibility is also a typical practice in which employees who need to respond to non-work responsibilities during work hours, can adjust and make-up the hours accordingly. This practice is used to address unexpected as well as anticipated needs for flexibility. For example, one employee arranged a later start time during the period her spouse worked an evening shift, in order to be home until her child caught the school bus. In other instances, arrangements have been made to allow an employee to work from home for the day. In addition, to these benefits, the Saskatoon Tribal Council closes its offices for the Christmas holidays as a means to allow all staff to spend time with family and/or community. In addition, opportunities for staff functions, family and community gatherings and celebrations are positively viewed and proactively pursued.

While these policies and practices typically work well to address employee needs regarding work-family balance, they are not cast in stone. Wendi Spence, Director of Human Resources for Saskatoon Tribal Council says that in practice they try to look at the individual's needs and their situation as a means to finding a workable accommodation as opposed to a "this doesn't meet policy" orientation. However, there have been situations that they haven't, in the end, been able to accommodate without creating other significant imbalances. Wendi says the

principle of holistic well-being underpins the tribal council's approach. In order to be healthy, productive and fulfilled, the entire person: emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually must be taken into account. Included in this is the individual's family, their community, their work and their personal needs.

In terms of payoff, Wendi Spence claims the benefits go beyond the tribal council and into the community. In actuality there are lots of employees who don't need, or make use of the policies and, there have been very few instances of abuse with these provisions. Furthermore, they remain open to re-examining their policies to ensure they are working. Another means of monitoring how their flexible practices are working is during routine meetings between the managers or program directors, as well as meetings between and within departments, or during organization-wide staff meetings. Wendi Spence characterizes the flow of information that arises from these meetings as going from top down to bottom up.

The challenge of manager and supervisor buy-in regarding flexible work practices is not uncommon, however it isn't one the tribal council has experienced. Wendi Spence thinks that's because these values are integral to their organization, "I think it's because of who we are, what the Tribal Council is." However, one of the challenges the Tribal Council does face is retention, and that often has to do with funding. In some instances program funding is year to year, and for those employees there may be more secure opportunities elsewhere. Salary can also be limited by these circumstances despite the tribal council's desire to offer higher wages. In addition the personal, community and cultural challenges faced by some employees also impacts on retention. That said however, the Tribal Council has many long-term employees and enjoys a high degree of productivity from its staff.

Wendi Spence thinks that's because there is a trusting relationship between the Tribal Council and its employees. "We trust that you are going to do a good job, put in your time and be honest." In turn the employee can trust the employer will be flexible and respond to their needs.

SaskPower

of Employees:

2,300 permanent employees
1,100 are members of the
International Brotherhood of
Electrical Workers Union (IBEW)
700 are members of the
Communications, Energy and
Paperworks Union (CEP)

Profile:

Power generating stations in the
North, in Estevan, Coronach and
Saskatoon as well as the Corporate
Head Office operations in Regina
and numerous field offices and
business centres throughout the
province.

Persons Interviewed:

Bonnie Peters, Human Resource
Consultant

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In the fall of 1999, the CEP Local 649 approached senior management at SaskPower and suggested entering into an agreement regarding work/life balance. Management agreed, and in early 2000, SaskPower began their work/life balance initiative.

Bonnie Peters, the management representative for this initiative, says that for an organization like SaskPower, this is a long-term, culture change process that will have to be sustained over a number of years, and will depend on extensive up front developmental work. To initiate the process, one of the first things Bonnie did was to consult with Judith Martin, who had been the Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Balancing Work and Family Initiative. With the help of a multi-step change model developed by Judith, Bonnie had a framework to begin the process.

Establishing a union/management steering committee was the next task, and this began with the circulation of a bulletin asking for expressions of interest to serve on the committee. Together, Bonnie and Larry Braun, President of the CEP, selected key people to comprise the union/management steering committee. As a starting point for the steering committee, an orientation process was undertaken to ensure committee members had an opportunity to build a working relationship, to gain an understanding of work/life balance issues and the mandate for their committee. At their first meeting in April 2000 committee members participated in a familiarization and team-building exercise and met with the Vice President of Human Resources to learn more about the parameters of their work. Following that, a binder of resource material providing background on the issue of work/life balance was prepared for each committee member and Judith Martin was invited to make a presentation to the committee regarding the findings of the 1998 provincial work and family research.

As its first task the committee worked on a plan to raise awareness of this initiative within SaskPower. Message posters, traditionally used by SaskPower as a means to focus attention on significant issues, were developed and distributed to all work sites.

The committee next began to plan the content and process for an information and awareness session regarding the initiative. In September of 2000, the committee delivered the session to fourteen different centres within the SaskPower network. The reaction from employees regarding the initiative was mixed, and while there was skepticism, there were also those who were strongly supportive. Bonnie Peters isn't discouraged though, because she realizes that a big part of the up-front developmental work is building the climate for this initiative. One of the most beneficial and immediate outcomes following these sessions was that IBEW Local 2067 Business Manager, Gord Gunoff expressed an interest in participating and was welcomed into the process. With both unions and management on board, the steering committee was well positioned to move ahead.

Shortly before the awareness sessions got underway, Bonnie Peters became aware of a national work/life study funded by Health Canada and conducted by Dr. Linda Duxbury. The study was seeking interested parties from various sectors to participate. The committee saw this as an opportunity they should consider because part of their work plan was to eventually survey staff. After examining the rationale and business case for participating in the national survey, all parties agreed that it was an opportunity SaskPower should capitalize on. As a result, during the awareness sessions employees were told that SaskPower would be participating in a national study regarding work/life balance that would involve a survey questionnaire being distributed to all staff. As it was anonymous, completing and submitting the questionnaire was not mandatory. Consequently, there was some concern about the potential rate of response. It turned out the survey was quite lengthy and that compounded the concerns, however, the response rate came in at about 40%. "A good response rate for a survey of that length," says Bonnie Peters.

In Spring 2001, the steering committee was presented with an analysis of the results for their organization. From there the committee's immediate plans are two-fold. First they will work to develop a process for informing employees of the results and secondly prepare recommendations for presentation to the union and management executives regarding implementation of a work/life balance strategy.

South Central Health District

of Employees:

1,100 employees throughout the geographic region with the main centre in Weyburn

Profile:

Working with three unions, the district operates, one acute care centre, the Weyburn General Hospital, four health centres and a 150 bed extended care facility, a 110 bed special care home, and a 14 bed psychiatric inpatient unit. In addition, South Central Health District is responsible for mental and public health and addictions services for their own district, as well as for South East and Moose Mountain Health Districts.

Persons Interviewed:

Lee Spencer, President and CEO

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South Central Health District is struggling with the same challenges experienced throughout the healthcare sector including limited finances to address increasingly complex healthcare services, recruitment and retention of qualified personnel, along with issues of staff morale. CEO, Lee Spencer feels that one of the keys to addressing these challenges is in paying attention to quality of life issues for their staff. The way he explains it is that the primary work of South Central Health District is providing quality of care to people in need and being able to do that, to a large degree, relies on quality staff. Succinctly put, if staff are able to maintain some balance between their family, personal and workplace needs, they in turn are more likely to be happy, committed to and effective in their work.

That means a big part of the organization's job is to work toward ensuring that staff have a healthy work environment, one that is responsive, flexible and supportive. To this end, management and supervisory staff have been offered sessions that focus on people management skills, conflict resolution, leadership styles and so on. In addition to accommodating flexible options, such as job-shares, variable hours, reduced work week, etc., managers and supervisors are encouraged to incorporate informal flexibility that allows them to respond at the local level to employee and operational needs.

Another initiative South Central Health District undertook about four years ago was helping to establish on-site, 24-hour childcare at the Souris Valley Extended Care. Staff surveys indicate that it is a highly valued feature of their workplace. In addition to providing a range of health benefits and an employee assistance program, a new leave policy has recently been implemented. Employees can now apply for an unpaid leave of up to two years to pursue personal, career or educational goals or needs. Lee Spencer says South Central already fills a lot of jobs on a temporary basis and if doing this allows a burned-out employee to move on, or to return recharged to her/his work, either way the employee, the patient and the organization win. Furthermore, if the employee comes back, they are more likely to feel a strong appreciation of and commitment to their employer.

Moving the organization in this direction continues to present challenges. While management and supervisory staff are encouraged to tailor flexibility at the local level, sometimes bureaucratic requirements or limitations stymie the process. Another challenge has been resistance from managers to innovation or change of this nature. Typically fears about "opening the door" to problems or abuse are voiced. Lee Spencer's response is that the majority of staff will behave responsibly while only a small percentage will be prone to exploiting it. "I don't think you make rules and regulations based on a small percent."

A new concept in long-term care is soon to be introduced with the opening of a new facility. The plan is to incorporate numerous innovations in how care is delivered and how residents live. Lee Spencer characterizes this as a huge change and he gives a lot of credit to both SUN, and CUPE for their partnership with the health district in making this happen. While it has been complicated to initiate these changes, the payoff is that it allows staff to work and residents to live, in a less institutional, more personalized environment. It is expected to be a more rewarding and healthy environment for both residents and staff.

Lee Spencer feels that his organization still has a long way to go toward the goal of healthy work environments however, organizational change of this nature takes a long time and requires a long-term investment. Spencer believes that in order to incorporate new ways of working, commitment from the highest level of the organization is essential and there needs to be at least one champion in senior management to drive the agenda forward. The ability to continue to move ahead in this direction is something for which Spencer credits the Board of Directors. "They are committed to the principle that our people are our most important asset."

CONCLUSION

These profiles show that the particulars, which make up the structure and culture of a workplace that is supportive of work-family/life balance and the processes undertaken to become family-friendly, are shaped by factors that are unique to each organization. As is often said, there is no cookie-cutter approach to this complex issue.

It is clear however that most organizations began the process of integrating work-family/life practices with a task, a practice, or a pilot project that was doable or realistic at the time. It is important to note that most of the eight organizations do not view this as a temporary or short-term process.

Other commonalities between these stories include a willingness to try something new, to learn from the process, and a readiness to make changes and adaptations as desired or necessary. Resonating through these profiles as well is an essential ingredient - having key people in the organization with either the authority or influence and the commitment to ensure sustained effort on work-family/life issues.

Each of the employers and their workplaces profiled in these pages has useful knowledge about "walking the family-friendly talk" and it is our hope that the readers will contact them directly.

The Work and Family Unit, Saskatchewan Labour, has a comprehensive set of work-family/life resources that you may access by being in touch with us at: 122 - 3rd Avenue North, Saskatoon, SK S7K 2H6; Phone: (306) 933-7983; Fax: (306) 933-5444; or email at wfb@lab.gov.sk.ca. Further, readers may wish to visit The Work and Family website at: www.workandfamilybalance.com

Endnotes

¹For a complete description and review of this initiative, which details the community development process see: J.A. Martin (2001). "A Canadian province highlights work/family issues: the Saskatchewan Balancing Work and Family Initiative – process, outcomes, limitations". In *Community, Work & Family*, Vol., 4, No. 1, 2001, Taylor and Francis Ltd., London, England.

²Duxbury, L and Higgins, C. (1998). Work-Life Balance in Saskatchewan: Realities and Challenges. Saskatchewan Labour, Government of Saskatchewan.

³Public Task Force on Balancing Work and Family (1998). Towards More Work-Family Balance in Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Labour, Government of Saskatchewan.

⁴Held September 10 and 11, 1998, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

⁵Ibid./n. 2.

⁶Ibid./n. 2.

⁷For example see: Martinez, Michelle Neely. "The Proof is in the Profits: Why Top Companies Now View Family-friendly Policies as a Competitive Tool," Working Mother, May, 1997, p. 28., and Axe!, Helen. Building the Business Case for Workplace Flexibility. New York: Conference Board, Report 1154-96-CH, 1996.